

BOOK ANDPAPER

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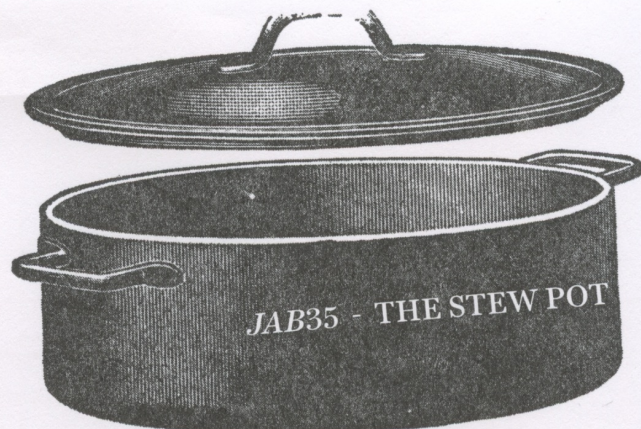


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BOOKTREKING THROUGH THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARTISTS' BOOKS— AND BEYOND

Thomas Hvid Kromann

On the occasion of the publication of Anne Moëglin-Delcroix's *Esthétique du livre d'artiste* and Clive Phillpot's *Booktrek*

"Where are the critics? The serious historians? The zones of discourse in which the field can reflect upon its own conceptual values? Ten years after the initial publication of [*The Century of Artists' Books*], we are still struggling to get such activity to emerge." This issue was raised by the scholar and book artist Johanna Drucker in the preface to the 2004 edition of *The Century of Artists' Books* (1995). Another ten years have passed since then. Have things changed? Yes and no, one could argue. There is still no counterpart to the critical response that exists within the literary field—that is to say, the institutionalised critical reception of a newly published book, which isn't just a reflection of the specific work and how it relates to the previous works by the author concerned, but also, at least ideally, a tentative discussion of the direction in which literature (or, in this case, the field of artists' books) is developing. Art exhibitions and monographs about art(ists) are constantly reviewed, but this happens very seldom with artists' books, although there are exceptions to the rule in *Art Monthly*, *Les Nouvelles de l'estampes*, *JAB* and *The Blue Notebook*. The lack of critical response has meant that artists' books aren't analysed and discussed in articles unless and until they reach canonical or paradigmatic status.

On the other hand, one could also argue that a strong process of institutionalisation has been taking place since Drucker raised this critique, especially over the last few years. The French scholar Anne Moëglin-Delcroix has talked about the "institutionalisation" of the artist's book, due to the fact that the artist's book now has a history, canonical works, canonised artists, collections, fairs, experts, various subsidies, research programmes and so on—as well as an increasing amount of well-informed secondary literature. A successful attempt to create a selected (and illustrated) bibliography is given in Arnaud Desjardin's *The Book on Books on Artists' Books* (The Every Day Press, 2011, new expanded edition 2013), which divides the secondary literature into the following ten categories: Exhibition Catalogs, General Reference, Collection Catalogs, Artist Monographs, Publisher Monographs, Artists' Books on Books, Periodicals, Publishers Catalogs, Yearbooks & Fair Catalogs and Dealerships. Obviously, the most comprehensive coverage comes in the categories General Reference and Artist Monographs, but Desjardin's groupings illustrate that the process of reception can be divided into a whole range of registers, with specific functions assigned to each. Categories such as Exhibition Catalogs and Yearbook & Fair Catalogs comprise the first, tentative attempts to discuss and analyse new artists' books and more general topics related to them. *The Book on Books on Artists' Books* is by no means exhaustive (the English-language and French secondary literature is well represented, but some important German publications aren't included), but it's probably the best place to start.

Two of the most important works about artists' books have been published recently—*Esthétique du livre d'artiste*, by Anne Moëglin-Delcroix, and *Booktrek*, by Clive Phillpot—and they're the focus of this article. However, a wide range of other publications are noteworthy: for example, the selection of Anne Moëglin-Delcroix's occasional writings about the topic in *Sur le livre d'artiste: Articles et écrits de circonstance, 1981–2005* (Le mot et le reste, 2006), Barbara Bader's *Modernism and the Order of Things: A Museography of Books by Artists* (Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften, 2010) and Leszek Brogowski's *Éditer l'art: Le livre d'artiste et l'histoire du livre* (Les Éditions de la transparence, 2010). All three works (with respectively 588, 244 and 350 pages) are substantial theoretical contributions to the field.

Other publications worth mentioning, which can be labelled "General Reference," are the monographs focusing on the artists' books from a single country. Although artists' books for some artists and publishers have been international—yes, even transnational—enterprises and

activities, the individual circumstances in terms of economic, cultural, and social aspects can be radically different. The national focus can also serve as a tool for rewriting the international history of the artist's book. (Have we forgotten some early pioneers or important artists, and, if so, is a historical revision necessary?, and so on.) Let's limit ourselves to three publications here: Betty Bright's *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960–1980* (Granary, 2005); *The Book as a Work of Art: The Italian Avant-Gardes in the Twentieth Century as Part of the International Panorama* (eds. Maffei & Picciau, Edizioni Corraini, 2007); and *Leafing . . . Four Decades of Artists' Books and Magazines in Spain* (ed. Núñez, Seacex, 2008).

The zones of discourse in which the field can reflect upon its own conceptual values, to quote Drucker again, have emerged. This is not to say that the need for reflection within the field of artists' books has been superseded or that all theoretical problems have been solved, but the conditions for a qualified reflection about the artist's book have changed. One could argue that a considerable amount of these theoretical writings are marked by their historical interest in focusing on a golden age of artists' books, from the end of the 1960s to around 1980. But one shouldn't overlook the various attempts to circumscribe contemporary artistic practice within this field, and furthermore an elaborated history of the artist's book (especially looking at the ideology inherent in its democratic pretensions) may well be of service to younger generations, whether it's a continuation, renewal or abandoning.

MÖEGLIN-DELCROIX AND PHILLPOT

But let's return to two recent works, namely Anne Moëglin-Delcroix's *Esthétique du livre d'artiste: Une introduction à l'art contemporain* (2012) and Clive Phillpot's *Booktrek: Selected Essays on Artists' Books* (1972–2010) (2013). The two authors have quite a lot in common. Both have from an early stage in the history of the artist's book been writing about this new phenomenon (Phillpot started publishing articles about artists' books as early as 1972, Moëglin-Delcroix around 1980), and both have continuously and with substantial results returned to this topic, right up to the present time. Both have focused on, even pleaded for, a definition of the artist's book as a "democratic," mass-produced (open or relatively large-edition) vehicle for art, without being blind to the paradoxes connected to this definition and the ideology attached to it (a cheap book can, for example, due to its large print run, be quite expensive to print—and "availability" in terms of distribution doesn't necessarily apply to the actual content of the books, which often weren't aimed at a large audience . . .). Both Moëglin-Delcroix and Phillpot have criticised the "book object" that sculptural and fetishistic interpretation of the book medium (an example could be the works represented in *Masters: Book Art*, Lark Crafts 2011), which, according to Moëglin-Delcroix and Phillpot, with its worshipping of the unique work, belongs to a part of the art world from which the artist's book has clearly distanced itself. Moëglin-Delcroix and Phillpot have furthermore not only curated exhibitions of artists' books throughout the years, but have also assembled two of the most important collections of artists' books. Moëglin-Delcroix was given responsibility for a very limited number of artists' books at the Département des Estampes et Photographie (the former Cabinet des Estampes) at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where she transformed this pile of books into a large collection over the period from 1979 to 1994. (She left the library in 1981 for the Sorbonne, but continued to work at the Bibliothèque Nationale on a voluntary basis for another fifteen years!) Phillpot, on the other hand, did build the A.B.C. (Artist Book Collection) during his years as director of the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1977 to 1994 (having formerly worked as a librarian at the Chelsea School of Art in London). Perhaps we should say that artists' books chose the two authors rather than the other way around: during their work as librarians they encountered this new artistic praxis and had to reflect on how to classify

these books—a pragmatic activity, which seems the perfect way to begin an aesthetic consideration.

To turn now to their books—both are reprints, but in different ways. *Esthétique du livre d'artiste: Une introduction à l'art contemporain* is an expanded, revised, and redesigned version of Moëglin-Delcroix's book, which was published in 1997. Unfortunately the book has been out of print for many years now, and the second-hand copy I saw for sale on Amazon in 2008 cost around \$170; even at that price it was quickly snapped up by another lucky soul. Phillpot's book, however, is an anthology of his articles, which had previously appeared in various magazines and books, and were thus difficult, but not impossible, to get hold of. It's a pleasure to welcome these books by two of the most knowledgeable theoretical contributors to the field.

BOOKTREK

Booktrek covers the whole period from the first "Feedback" column in Studio International in 1972 up to the previously unpublished essay "Sol LeWitt's Books: Complete & Incomplete," from 2010. Between these two points in time, the history of the artist's book develops and the field of activity itself comes into existence. Although artists published numerous important artists' books in the 1960s, the criticism and exhibitions of artists' books starts in the beginning of the 1970s. The volume contains twenty-five articles, approximately a third of the total number of articles that Phillpot has written about the subject (no changes have been made to the texts, although some articles have been shortened). A dialogue with the publisher Lionel Bovier from JRP/Ringier and the curator Christophe Cheriex from MoMA (seven pages), serves as a prologue, which, by virtue of its many noteworthy aspects, could be twice that length, and there is also an interesting introduction, "From N.E. Thing Co. to Anything Goes," where Phillpot's career is described, from his days at the Chelsea School of Art to his time as director of the library at MoMA (and finally returning to Europe as a freelance critic, mission accomplished on the western frontier).

In this book Phillpot addresses a variety of prospective readers of books and specialised art journals, even including an artistic-critic mash-up of Ed Ruscha and Sigmund Freud ("Evidence: Royal Road Test by Cleve Filpot"). It is perforce a heterogeneous book, but artists' books are the connecting thread that runs through the book, and Phillpot is a fine (and, let's not forget, funny) writer. In my opinion some of the longer texts devoted to Ed Ruscha and Sol LeWitt are among the finest, whereas more casual pieces, such as the ones about Pavel Büchler and Ray Johnson, are minor contributions in themselves, although they fit in quite well with the overall theme.

To read *Booktrek* is to follow Phillpot's own theoretical (especially terminological) development, which in many ways seems to coincide with that of the artist's book (at least in Europe and the United States). A book like this, spanning over five decades, can't help but be a work-in-progress: here we are now, in 1972, in 1982, in 1993... A recurrent motif is the discussion of what to call and how to define the new phenomenon. Definitions are discussed, and Phillpot's famous diagrams see the light of the day in Artforum and Art Libraries Journal in 1982 and 1993 respectively (and are reprinted in this book). At the very beginning Phillpot compares artists' books to a more generalised "history of the book," not as a homogeneous part of it but rather as a break—and quite quickly as a separate field. The conception of artists' books is from the beginning very clear—art in the book format, preferably as ordinary as possible, easy to print and to disseminate, an open or large edition, in short—the democratisation of the arts. But what should one call it? "Artists' books" seem to indicate any artist's book, so Phillpot moves on to "book art" and later "bookworks" without really finding a perfect solution, because artists and critics (of whom he meets a lot, due to his "open door policy" at MoMA) use the terminology in directly contradictory ways.

A wide range of artists, well known and unknown, appear throughout

Clive Phillpot *Booktrek*

Clive Phillpot, *Booktrek*, 2013

the book—recurring figures are artists such as Carl Andre, John Baldessari, Jan Dibbets, Davi Det Hompson, Richard Long, Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner and Sol LeWitt, as well as theorists like Lucy Lippard (co-founder of Printed Matter), Ulises Carrión, and Anne Moëglin-Delcroix.

However, the advantage of the anthology format—the variety of texts—can also be a drawback. It's a compilation of what has been written (as, Phillpot notes at the beginning initially, almost every contribution was commissioned) instead of a newly constructed, coherent totality: hence the occasional inevitable repetitions. But the aim was not to write a new book from scratch (in which case I would have wanted to see all the previous writings on which it drew)—although I would have loved to hear more about, for example, the Latin American and Eastern European artists' books, which Phillpot gets interested in but writes very little about. The book is not itself a tool for further theoretical speculations, due to its heterogeneity and historical nature, but because of its archival status it has an archival potential for pointing out other directions. That is to say—by giving us discrete glimpses into different time periods, it allows us to see things we would not have seen (and to read about artists or works we wouldn't otherwise have known about) in a book conceived, written, and produced from A to Z in 2013 or rewritten as a new, more homogenous piece.

A primary example of the work-in-progress could be the status of Ed Ruscha. At the beginning he's mentioned as one of number of artists working with artists' books, but after a while his special status is clear, and he becomes the paradigmatic example of an artist working in this area. This paradigmatic status is re-examined after some time, and there's a need for other pioneers than him (he can't be the only one), so two new figures arrive on the scene: the Brazilian Leandro Katz and the Swede Åke Hodell. The need for a revision is legitimate, but the argument isn't completely convincing in the case of Katz, who, at least to me, seems to publish poetry books. In the end Ruscha is canonised in one of the longest and finest articles in the book, "Ed Ruscha: Sixteen Books and Then Some" (originally published in 1999).

Phillpot has some really interesting things to say about the democratisation of the arts (through the artist's book) and the simultaneous institutionalisation of the artist's book, "with so many libraries establishing 'archives' of artists' books, the hundred books that constituted these editions quite quickly disappeared into the proliferating institutional collections and began to live a cloistered life" (p. 21). So who was the audience—just the librarians dealing with the books in the restricted areas of art libraries? A good question!

And this question isn't the only one. The *Booktrek* isn't done yet. Although the contributions about the contemporary scene are modest, *Booktrek* is a strong reminder of the original intentions of the artist's book. And a largely expanded version of his introductory article, "From N.E. Thing Co. to Anything Goes," possibly published separately as a small book, with more information and details about the New York art scene and the rise of the artist's book, would be very welcome. A publication like *Franklin Furnace and the Spirit of the Future* (2011), about the artist-driven archive, whose artists' books Clive Phillpot acquired for MoMA and which now makes up a substantial part of MoMA's collection, might need supplementing.

THE AESTHETICS OF THE ARTIST'S BOOK

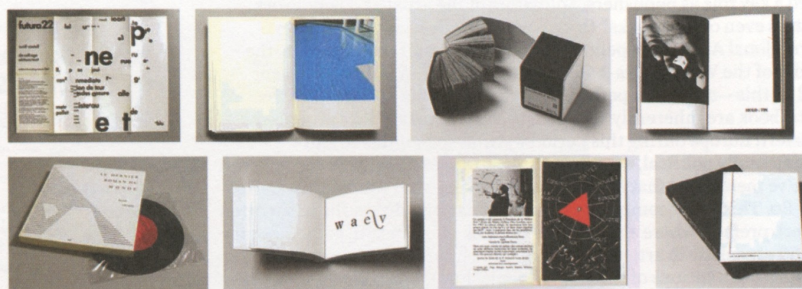
Esthétique du livre d'artiste was, as has already been mentioned, first published in 1997, but has been out of print for quite a while, which is a shame, because in my opinion it is the book about artists' books. It's certainly not the only book, but it's definitely the most comprehensive monograph about the field. As my introductory remarks showed, a lot of substantial research is written in other languages than English, especially French, and one can only be satisfied with this "national" research in a world of growing monolingual research, which tends to isolate research

in the humanities and place it in peer-reviewed reserves. But at the same time it has the all-too-obvious consequence that the reception of *Esthétique du livre d'artiste* is limited to a far more narrow circle of scholars, art critics, artists and so on than it deserves. The book is quite long (444 pages, of which 400 pages comprise three-column text, but also with a wealth of illustrations) and aimed at an academic audience, but with the growing international interest in artists' books the time has come to make this indispensable reference source available to a non-French-reading audience. A major publishing house such as MIT Press or Black Dog Publishing should commission a translation and publish it. The book is relevant not only to people interested in artists' books but also to anyone interested in modern and contemporary art, because, as Mœglin-Delcroix argues so persuasively, artists' books do not exist in their own isolated field. Rather, they were a significant part of the artistic changes of the 1960s and 1970s, and even a privileged vehicle for this aesthetic, cultural and social reorientation. That's why the new subtitle for the work is "*une introduction à l'art contemporain*," "an introduction to contemporary art."

It's difficult to do justice to *Esthétique du livre d'artiste* in a short review like this, because of the sheer wealth of detail, the sophisticated readings and the footnotes, packed with relevant information: we're really talking about a generous work here by one of the major specialists in the field. Anyway, let's start with the structure of the book. *Esthétique du livre d'artiste* is divided into seven main chapters. In Chapter one ("Qu'est-ce qu'un livre d'artiste?") "What is an Artist's Book") the necessary terminological and historical delimitations are drawn up. In broad terms, Mœglin-Delcroix shares the same conception of the artist's book as Phillpot (although small battles are fought in a footnote here and there)—it's a matter of the book as a vehicle for art, real books, plain books—no book objects, please (and, as with Phillpot, no electronic or digital experiences are taken into consideration). Likewise, she acknowledges the terminological dilemmas but sticks, wisely enough, to the French counterpart of artists' books, *livres d'artistes*, instead of introducing a neologism or a new label.

Chapters two to seven have an identical structure. In each of them a movement (such as, for example, fluxus) or a tendency (like the playful experimentation with the book medium's material conditions) is presented initially through the artists' books produced by a single artist: Chapter two is on Ian Hamilton Finlay and concrete poetry, Chapter three on Robert Filliou and fluxus, Chapter four on the year 1969 (!) and conceptual art, Chapter five on Christian Boltanski and the collection/archive, Chapter six on Sol LeWitt and serial/narrative structures, and Chapter seven on Bernard Villiers and the book as an object, but not the book object! After a thorough analysis of the respective theme of each chapter and the relevant artists' books, numerous other artists and artists' books are included. This strategy functions very well, especially with the lavish illustrations and the very precise micro-analyses, which in only a limited space manage to give a clear picture of each artist's book. And the chapters have been perfectly constructed, so that they neither include too much (resulting in a lack of precision) nor, worse, exclude too many important artists' books. Three small comments here—the connection between concrete poetry and artists' books is clear, moving from a single page up to the whole book, although it's not always clear for me whether this or that book by a concrete poet included in the study is actually an artist's book. My second comment concerns the "book object." Although I agree in general with the distinction between artists' books and book objects (maybe it would be easier to use the term "book sculpture"), it's easier to do this in a general study than when analysing a more narrowly defined area (a single country, a single artist), where to omit either form would give a less interesting picture of the production, although the need for differentiation of course still exists. The third comment—it's often said that an artist's book must be printed in a large edition (100+ copies), but this viewpoint, necessary for the librarian, can be too strict. A book

ANNE MÆGLIN-DELCROIX



ESTHÉTIQUE DU LIVRE D'ARTISTE

UNE INTRODUCTION À L'ART CONTEMPORAIN



LE MOT ET LE RESTE / BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d'artiste: Une introduction à l'art contemporain*, 1997

published in an edition of twenty copies may not fit in with the ideology of the democratisation of the arts, but it may, in my opinion, still be a real artist's book for the people sitting with it. And what about those unique works which were conceived as book objects but which, simply due to a lack of money, didn't make it into print?

Esthétique du livre d'artiste is an expanded and revised second edition. It must have been an interesting and demanding job to revise the book after fifteen years. Mœglin-Delcroix explains in the new preface that she did consider following the path into the twenty-first century but finally concluded that, due to the growth of publications and the amount of global activity, this could not be done single-handedly and had to be a collective research project. So she sticks to the original time-frame, 1960–1980 (except where major artists, such as Boltanski, have continued publishing artist's books). So, what's new? There has certainly been a significant increase in the number of illustrations, from approximately 400 (black-and-white, as well as color) to approximately 600 (mostly in color). As with the first edition, from 1997, which I've spotted in non-French-speaking friends' bookcases, the book is worth buying just for the amount of illustrations—it's a gold mine.

The new edition includes fifty pages more than the original (and probably even more, since it has three columns instead of the original two). The small revisions and additions here and there are, of course, difficult to spot. Some artists have gained in influence, for example Hans-Peter Feldmann, who, rightly enough, has a much more prominent position than he had in 1997. As Mœglin-Delcroix underlines in an interview in *Danish Artists' Books* (eds. Kromann et al., Møller & Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013) [see page 20 in this JAB for a review], three important additions have been made—the first is geographical (a strengthened focus on South America and Eastern Europe, including Paweł Petasz and Jiri Valoch), the second is in the area of feminist artists

(among them Ida Applebroog and Carolee Schneemann) and the third being artists “whose publications are not milestones in the field, but who played a key role as publishers, animators of the artist’s book network, agitators even or mavericks” (p. 65), who include Klaus Groh, from International Artists Cooperation Publications, and Leif Eriksson, the founder of the Wedgepress & Cheese Publications. A fourth comment could be this—should we perhaps recognise that the aesthetics of the artists’ book are inherently Western, because artists’ books produced in Eastern Europe during this period were often handmade and fundamentally political, even illegal, due to a repressive political system?

I’ve mentioned that Moeglin-Delcroix keeps her focus on the period 1960–80. This is not completely true. For this new edition she has written a superb preface, where she explains the lack of interest in contemporary art, and especially in artists’ books (ignored by art collections, art critics and in solo exhibitions of the artists themselves), in the 1990s when the first edition was conceived, and by contrast, the current situation. Moeglin-Delcroix strongly criticises two current tendencies, for which she coins the neologisms “bibliophilisation from the outside” and “bibliophilisation from the inside” (my translation). The first includes the (un?)intentional mixing of artists’ books with other types of books by artists (the illustrated book, the *livre de luxe*) at exhibitions as a result of mental laziness and a lack of historical knowledge, thereby turning the story of the artist and the book into one without breaks and conflicts—the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s is gone! The second tendency concerns the artist herself, given that a lot of artists are copying the *livre de luxe* by printing it in a deliberately small edition (and numbering and signing it), with the focus more on the object than on the book. More on the art market than on the arts. This last tendency can be seen even at fairs such as the NY Art Book Fair, but it doesn’t seem to dominate these places (sometimes the problem seems instead to be all the bad artists’ books, not bad just because they are book objects, but bad as in poorly conceived and executed . . .).

To be continued . . .

The recent books on artists’ books, among these the highly commendable *Booktrek* and *Esthétique du livre d’artiste*, not only demonstrate the history of artists’ books, with its many major works and major artists, but also underline the inherent potential of using the book medium in the service of art, although the danger of bibliophilisation certainly lurks in every corner.

Keep on *Booktrekking* in the Gutenberg Galaxy!

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Thomas Hvid Kromann (b. 1974) has a Ph.D and is a writer living in Copenhagen. He has published articles about avant-garde related subjects in Scandinavian journals and magazines. Kromann has published six literary books, recently the satirical novel *Saksehånd* (2011). He was one of the editors of *Danish Artists’ Books*, 2013, Møller (Copenhagen) and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Heather Beuchler (HB)

Levi Sherman (LS)

Shelly Carter (SC)

Bäcker, Heimrad.

Seascope: Transcription by Heimrad Bäcker.

Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013. 5.75 × 7.5 in.

edition of 500, \$25, (\$18 direct from UDP)

<http://shop.uglyducklingpresse.org/>

Seascope by Heimrad Bäcker (1925–2003) is a recent and welcome addition to Ugly Duckling Presse’s Lost Literature series. The book is letterpress-printed with gray ink and hand-bound, resulting in a soft-spoken quality that belies its subject. Translated into English by Patrick Greaney, the 1985 work, which constituted the entire thirty-second issue of Bäcker’s magazine *Neue Texte*, is a powerful piece of appropriated writing. Like Bäcker’s other books, *Seascope* excerpts text from Holocaust documents—in this case the ship’s log of a German submarine and the captain’s testimony during the Nuremberg Trials.

The use of documentary material not only determines the content of the book, but also the form. The spare layout of type, mostly white space, reflects the sparse language and design of the original documents. Nevertheless, the narrative is deeply affecting as it retells the Germans’ encounter with and refusal to rescue stranded Norwegian sailors, who are resupplied and abandoned to their certain death. The use of negative space around the text, though reminiscent of the ship’s log, is not merely a convenient coincidence. It serves to invoke a sense of absence and loss, not just of life, but also of information, which is critical to Bäcker’s work. It reminds the reader that they are seeing only a tiny portion of the documentation of these events. As an act of witnessing, *Seascope* addresses not only the events of the Shoah, but also the memory, documentation, and language thereof.

Bäcker’s focus on aesthetics and linguistics through historic documents results in what he called “documentary poetry,” which is the result of three factors. The first factor is Bäcker as an Austrian poet in the era during which Theodor Adorno, in the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society,” from his book *Prisms* declared: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Bäcker sought to show that aesthetics were deeply implicated in the horrors that transpired. Greaney, who translated this edition, writes extensively on this in his essay which focuses on Bäcker’s later books “Aestheticization and the Shoah: Heimrad Bäcker’s Transcript” in the journal *New German Critique*. He says Bäcker “aims not to create a new language but to allow its readers to gain some kind of knowledge about the specialized language of National Socialism.” (34) *Seascope* thus aims to show that language, as a tool used by the Third Reich, is worthy of witnessing.

To Bäcker, it is not only the unspeakable events of the Holocaust that are worrisome, it is the very belief that they are “unspeakable.” That this discourse persists even today is evident in Jacques Rancière’s 2003 book, *The Future of the Image*, in which the final chapter is entitled “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?” and grapples with representations of the Holocaust. To this question, Bäcker would say, “no.” Bäcker shows us, Greaney writes, that the Holocaust was “an eminently describable and described act that was spoken about, extensively, by thousands of people concerned about the precision and even the beauty of their language.” (35) Rancière comes to a similar conclusion and ends his book with the thought that “the logic of the unrepresentable can only be sustained by a hyperbole that ends up destroying it.” (138)

This understanding of *Seascope* as witness to not just the Holocaust, but especially its representation makes sense of the particular documents which are used. Rather than primary sources, the book is taken from testimony at a tribunal. The captain’s recitation of the events, though concise to the point of callousness is still mediated by the language of National Socialism, and so exists in tension with the objective style of the weather entries in his ship’s log. These nuanced linguistics are more than the result of Bäcker’s careful study or philosophical engagement with Adorno—they result from the poet’s own eager adolescent participation in the Hitler Youth, the implications of which he dealt with for the remainder of his creative life.

It would not do the work justice to read it simply as Bäcker’s attempt to reconcile his youthful and thus mitigated moral lapse. He was committed to avant-garde poetry, and *Seascope* fits easily into the tradition of poetry with a meaningful visual component. For instance, Stéphane Mallarmé’s seminal work, *Un Coup de Dés*, shares *Seascope*’s emphasis on negative space, expressive use of typography, and even the theme of shipwreck. By referring to the poetry canon, Bäcker strengthens his assertion that the Shoah occupies a place on the cultural spectrum. He also further challenges his own use of Nazi language by aligning his work with experimental poetry. The poetic success Bäcker achieves through the aesthetics of grim documentation, and its easy fit within an art and poetry discourse are perhaps the most unsettling aspects of his project, even alongside the inhumanity elicited in *Seascope*.

Readers of this complex work will benefit from the inclusion of a new afterword by Charles Bernstein. His writing not only situates *Seascope* within a corpus of similar works by poets including Åke Hodell and Charles Reznikoff, but also highlights how Bäcker’s work differs. Of note is the integral nature of citation as well as the layers of transcription. Bernstein reminds the reader that *Seascope* is not simply a transcription as the subtitle states, but rather a transcription (*Seascope*) of a transcription (873-D) of a transcription (ship’s log). By further complicating the line between reference and literature, the afterword contextualizes this book in a literary struggle to find poetry in an undeniably barbaric world.

(LS)